

The Digital Workplace: More Than Just Remote

The past three years ushered in the widespread adoption of remote and hybrid work and, with it, increased reliance on digital tools for collaboration and access. But the shift to those tools does more than just make work-at-home easier in a crisis. The digital workplace is anywhere and everywhere, and it's building agency cultures that are more responsive and resilient.

In a recent GovLoop virtual event, **Understanding the Digital Workplace**, experts from government and industry met to discuss the new digital environment, and what it offers agencies wherever their employees may be.

It's What, Not Where

Digital tools have made the workplace less a building than an infrastructure. As Hardy, of GSA's Public Buildings Service, put it, "A well-designed workplace environment effectively integrates people, place, and technology into a solution that enables mission."

The digital workplace is one that integrates devices, software, hardware and processes "to enable more effective ways of working," said Casuga, of the Office of Collaboration Workplace & Collaboration Service Line at NASA.

In addition to communication, collaboration, and project management tools that can be shared online, an agency's data and applications also need to be safely accessible both on premises and remotely, according to Ramirez, of Red Hat's CTO Organization.

The speakers:

Francisco Ramirez

Chief Architect, State and Local Government, CTO Organization, Red Hat

Jules Casuga

Chief, Office of Collaboration Workplace & Collaboration Service Line, Office of the Chief Information Office, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)

Charles Hardy

AIA, CCM, Chief Architect, Public Buildings Service, U.S. General Services Administration (GSA)



Be Ready for Change

Making more of its work digital has already helped GSA cope with Washington, D.C.'s "Snowmageddon" in 2010 and Superstorm Sandy in 2012, and was invaluable during the shutdowns in 2020. "We were able to keep buildings and operations running. That's what the technology has done, and that's what new skillsets have done," Hardy said.

Not only can agencies respond more easily to weather or other emergencies, but they've learned techniques that help them adapt to changes in technology, said Casuga.

When offices were emptied in 2020, he explained, the remote-work tools weren't really ready. But they evolved to meet the moment, and agencies became more adept at adopting new applications. NASA is now using those skills to evaluate possible introduction of generative artificial intelligence (AI).

The Outlook

Because there are still many things that function better when teams are in the same physical space, Ramirez predicts there may be more hybrid, rather than fully remote, work in the future. At the same time, he sees a need for companies to consolidate the COVID-era hodgepodge of collaborative tools into something more integrated and focused.

The future digital workplace will rely more on automation, said Casuga, to bring together different missions and areas of expertise. That may include new uses of AI, especially to respond to government's customers.

But the secret to meeting the future is to act now, according to Hardy. "Don't freeze, because this is an ongoing development." Test, evaluate, and reassess, he said. "Those iterations will get us where we need to be. But it starts with acting."

Be Intentional About Culture

Part of the framework that lets agencies adopt new technology is communication. Employees need to be able to give feedback and ask questions.

"It's got to be a conversation," Hardy said. "You're co-creating solutions with the end user."

Agencies do need to be mindful about how the increased reliance on digital collaboration and communication tools affects their culture. The team spirit that sprang up spontaneously when everyone was in the same place needs to be cultivated in the digital environment.

Setting aside time for virtual team-building activities and informal conversations may have seemed "kitschy" at first, to use Ramirez' word, but as the company continued in remote mode, people appreciated the personal contact.

And remember, newer and younger employees may want to spend time in the office to learn the ropes and meet their colleagues.



To learn more, check out the [on-demand version of the full session](#).